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BAPTIST

FAITH AND PRACTICE,

ACCORDING TO THE

CONVICTIONS OF BAPTIST LAYMEN.

FROM THE ADDRESS OF
GEORGE T. HOPE, Esq.,
PRESIDENT OF THE
AMERICAN BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY,
AT SARATOGA, MAY 27, 1880.

PHILADELPHIA:
AMERICAN BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY,
1420 CHESTNUT STREET.

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BAPTIST FAITH AND PRACTICE.

THE American Baptist Publication Society, either because of the extent and importance of its publishing business, or for other sufficient reason, has been called the Laymen's Society. This circumstance, combined with the fact that in Baptist churches laymen are accredited with larger liberty than in Christian churches generally, may justify a layman in stating in simple and plain language, in the presence of an assembly of which Baptist clergymen form so large a portion, what are the convictions of the Baptist laymen of America upon the principal subjects in

respect to which Baptists differ from other evangelical denominations.

The knowledge of these convictions is derived from an acquaintance and intercourse for many years with a large number of members of different Baptist churches; men of such varying grades in culture, position, and influence, that their main point of equality is found in their fidelity to the teachings of the Bible. This presentation of these convictions of Baptist laymen is prompted by the assertions and iterations of Pedobaptist journals, and the occasional utterances of individuals, that the former firmness of Baptists respecting baptism and the Lord's Supper is giving place to a different sentiment, and one that affords indications of Christian union, which is to grow out

of a surrender by Baptists of what they have ever claimed to be the Bible teaching on these subjects. If Baptists are drifting, as suggested by such statements, it is important that Baptists be made acquainted with the fact. It is not expected that any who have given even a moderate degree of thought to the matters involved will find anything new in the views here presented, save only that they are those of Baptist *laymen*, rather than of Baptist ministers or Baptist journals.

The points of difference between Baptists and non-Baptists especially referred to are :

1. WHAT IS BAPTISM?
2. WHO ARE PROPER SUBJECTS FOR BAPTISM?
3. WHAT IS PRE-REQUISITE TO PROPER

ADMISSION TO CHURCH-FELLOWSHIP AND
THE LORD'S SUPPER?

1. *What is baptism?* Baptist laymen hold that the ordinance of baptism, if practiced as the Bible teaches, involves immersion invariably; that this is the plain reading of the Sacred Word, and is what every reader would understand, if not led by teaching external to the Bible to suppose that it does not, in this particular, mean what it says. When the Saviour was on earth, he declared, with emphasis, that the commandments of God were made void by the traditions of men. Baptist laymen know further, that what they understand to be this plain teaching of the Bible in regard to baptism has been declared to be its real teaching by a long succession of scholars of many dif-

ferent denominations, who have studied and written upon the subject; scholars so able and so eminent that in comparison with them the lesser lights, who, with a rash ambition to prove that true which they wish to be true, appear at such marked disadvantage in their struggles to establish their theories, that it will be surprising if their children do not some day wish their ancestors had confined to verbal utterances such efforts to make "the worse appear the better reason." Baptist laymen have no apprehensions as to the verdict which will be rendered upon this subject by the scholars of the future, and they note with interest that whenever the opposition to Baptist faith and practice respecting baptism becomes unusually aggressive, some non-Baptist

arises, as Dean Stanley does in his "Eastern Church" and in his *Nineteenth Century* article, to brush away perversities, and to say unhesitatingly and unmistakably, that the Bible means just what it says, and that the mode of baptism in the Apostolic age, and long after, was in accord with the practice of the Baptists of this day.

Baptist laymen know that this was the practice, with substantial universality, during two-thirds of the years that have passed since the baptism of the Messiah; and also that the rare exceptions which were reluctantly assented to were permitted because of a post-apostolic and mistaken idea that baptism was indispensable to salvation.

Akin to the position of Dean Stanley

is that of James Anthony Froude, the historian, who in the third chapter of his *John Bunyan*, published this present year, in speaking of Mr. Gifford, the minister of the Baptist Church at Bedford, says: "In the language of that time, he became convinced of sin, and joined the Baptists, the most thorough-going and consistent of all the Protestant sects. If the sacrament of baptism is not a magical form, but is a personal act, in which the baptized person devotes himself to Christ's service, to baptize children at an age when they cannot understand what they are doing may well seem irrational and even impious."

Baptist laymen assume that no one will suspect either Mr. Froude or Dean Stanley of having any peculiar affiliation

with Baptists. Their statements are evidently made, because what they thus state they know to be simple truth, and they are too frank to hesitate to speak that truth.

2. *Who are proper subjects of baptism?*
Baptist laymen are convinced that the only proper subjects for baptism are those who, for their own individual selves, have exercised voluntary and intelligent faith in the Redeemer of mankind, and have been subjects of the regenerating power of God's Spirit. They do not believe that there is any such thing as an inherited faith; nor that, by virtue of birth, or of any other accident, there can be claimed for any human being a preemptive right to salvation or to the ordinances which belong only, as they read the Bible, to the spiritually enlightened.

3. *What is prerequisite to proper admission to church fellowship and the Lord's Supper?* Baptist laymen find nowhere in the Bible that any, excepting those who were baptized after the exercise of personal faith, were ever partakers of the Lord's Supper, and they feel constrained to be governed in this also by the teaching of the examples recorded in the Bible. Baptist laymen are in no wise affected by the nonsense which has been uttered about Bible "household baptisms." Many Baptist churches present instances of whole families baptized upon profession of faith by each individual member, and there are churches that contain among their membership a number of such family examples. Baptist laymen hold that the Bible order—that men first believe, then

be baptized, and then commemorate the Redeemer's sufferings and death and resurrection in the ordinance of the Supper—is inflexibly binding upon them; and that no mortal man, of whatever station, in a church or out of it; and that no gathering of men, however great in numbers or exalted in piety or reputation, or whatsoever powers are ascribed to or claimed by it—has any right to alter or amend, to modify or ameliorate, to sanction or approve of any change in, what the Bible teaches as Christian duty. Baptist laymen understand from the Bible that each human being “shall give account of *himself* to God,” and the accountability being thus individual, no act of any church or council, or of all Christendom combined, can be pleaded in miti-

gation of, or as an excuse for, errors taught or received by intelligent men who have the Bible in their hands.

Baptist laymen believe that fidelity to God's word is a duty which they have no right to neglect or evade, no matter to what obloquy or misrepresentation such faithfulness may subject them. Their belief that their fidelity to the truth has had influence for good, and for God, is confirmed by the statement of the Boston Monday lecturer (Joseph Cook), who, in a lecture delivered three years ago, while showing how the New-England churches in the time of Jonathan Edwards had, from obvious causes, drifted into secularization, declared that the Baptists were entitled to the credit of having at all times maintained and insisted that a

Christian church consisted of believers only. He also stated incidentally that his own father is a Baptist, but expressed gratification that he is an "open-communion" Baptist. The Baptist laymen of *this* day think that if the Baptists of New England in *that* day had practised "open communion," their protests against the practices which secularized the New-England churches generally, would have been of small value; that their practice of "open communion" would have nullified to a large extent, if not altogether, all of their written or verbal protests.

The Baptist laymen of this day hold that Baptists who practice "open communion" express only a preference for believers' baptism by immersion; and that, in effect, they assent that any other

of those acts called baptism is adequate and sufficiently Scriptural, and that there is no principle of fidelity to God's word involved in the matter. They hold that if the Baptist churches could be brought to the practice of "open communion," all necessity for, or advantage to result from, the continuance of the Baptist denomination, as a denomination, would be ended; and in that event, Baptists would be wiser if they abandoned their distinct organization; ceased altogether to disturb Pedobaptists by compelling them, as is the case with many of them now, to doubt the propriety of their baptism; and united with such other existing denomination as met their views on other subjects most nearly. The natural tendency of Baptist churches, if they practiced "open com-

munion," would be toward Pedobaptism ; and this would be the result, except where, for a time, they were held in place by a pastor possessing unusual devotion and ability ; or where, in case the pastor were as erratic as he would be erroneous, he would be at the head of a church which had no fixed principle upon the subject.

Baptist laymen do not by any means regard the points named as all that distinguish them from other evangelical denominations. Fidelity to God's word in a matter which meets with so much dislike and opposition necessarily tends to fidelity to that word in all respects ; while the want of that fidelity in any one point as certainly tends to a want of fidelity to it in other respects, and in all respects.

On the 4th of November, 1878, in the

city of New York, Dean Stanley said in reply to an address of Baptist ministers, "You have alluded to me as an ecclesiastical historian, and have referred to the undoubted antiquity of your principal ceremony—that of immersion. I feel that here, also, we ought to be grateful to you for having, almost alone in the Western Church, preserved intact this singular and interesting relic of primitive and apostolic times, which we—you will forgive me for saying so—which we, at least in our practice, have wisely discarded." Whatever the effect of these words may have been upon the ministers who heard it, the Dean succeeded in shocking the Baptist laymen who read his reply. That the form of a rite, to which Christ submitted himself, which he

enjoined upon his followers, and which his Apostles practiced as long as they lived, should be "*discarded*" by men bearing the Christian name; and that this seemingly contemptuous discarding should be declared, by church authority so elevated, to have been "*wisely*" done, appears to Baptist laymen to be full of irreverence and assumption. They ask themselves, Is it possible that a Christian man may deliberately declare that any part of God's instructions can be "*wisely discarded*"? Shall Christian men, they ask, sit in judgment upon and condemn *his* requisitions?

In his *Nineteenth Century* article, published in October, 1879, Dean Stanley says: "For the first thirteen centuries, the almost universal practice of baptism

was that of which we read in the New Testament, and which is the very meaning of the word 'baptize;' that those who were baptized were plunged, submerged, immersed in water. That practice is still, as we have seen, continued in the Eastern Churches. In the Western Church it still lingers in the solitary instance of the Cathedral of Milan; among Protestants, in the austere sect of the Baptists. It lasted long in the middle ages." . . .

"It had, no doubt, the sanction of the Apostles and of their Master." . . . "The cold climate of Russia has not been found an obstacle to its continuance throughout that vast Empire." . . . "Elizabeth and Edward VI. were both immersed." . . .

"The change from immersion to sprinkling has set aside the larger part of the

Apostolic language regarding baptism, and has altered the very meaning of the word."

And he says also, to the amazement of devout, God-fearing, and God-loving Baptist laymen, that "the practice of immersion, Apostolic and primitive as it was, was peculiarly unsuitable to the tastes, the convenience, and the feelings of the countries of the North and West," and also, that "speaking generally, the civilized world has decided against it. It is a striking example of the triumph of common sense and convenience over the bondage of form and custom," and also that "it shows how the spirit which lives and moves in human society can override even the most sacred ordinances."

Baptist laymen remember that Christ

was himself thus baptized, and that he commanded his Apostles, "Go ye therefore and teach *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," and, as it is recorded in still ampler form, "Go ye into *all the world* and preach the gospel to *every creature*," with an injunction to baptize those that believe; and they ask, Are we to obey *man* rather than *God* in this matter, or shall we still obey God rather than man? Shall "the *tastes* and the *feelings*," "the *common sense*," and "*convenience*" of "the *civilized world*" control Christian men, when these decree that that shall *not* be done, which the Lord of life and glory directed to *be* done?—Shall "the spirit which lives and moves in human society override even

the most sacred ordinances," of which "God manifest in the flesh" enjoined the observance, at a moment so solemn as that when this command was given, and in a manner so emphatic and majestic? Which, Baptist laymen ask, shall control; the "civilized world," "its tastes and convenience" and its "common sense," or the Almighty builder of the world? In this contest, Baptist laymen range themselves under the banner of Omnipotence.

Baptist laymen are satisfied that when Christ gave this command he was not ignorant in regard to the climates of the earth he had formed, and as he did not fix a latitude at which his command that his followers should be baptized as he was baptized might be modified into some less rigorous, though less significant

form ; as he did not provide for modifications to suit the more acute and delicate tastes of advanced modern civilization,—they propose still to abide by his command, and to trust to his omniscience to justify itself whenever he pleases before all the world.

Dean Stanley may well say “ that the change from immersion to sprinkling has set aside the larger part of the Apostolic language regarding baptism, and has altered the very meaning of the word.” The significant and instructive symbolism of baptism is lost without immersion, and the Apostolic words “ for we are buried with him by baptism into death,” become meaningless and absurd, if not applied to baptism by immersion. When he intimates that baptism by immersior

is "unsuitable to the tastes and feelings," the unavoidable deduction of Baptist laymen from his expression is that he never saw such a baptism, for they recall the solemn thrills with which they have witnessed it, and they know of many and many an instance in which men who witnessed it with them have, under the profound impressions then made, begun a new life and followed on that new life unto life everlasting. The title of this *Nineteenth Century* article is "BAPTISM, by the VERY REVEREND THE DEAN OF WESTMINSTER." Baptist laymen do not mean "to speak evil of dignities," but they cannot avoid feeling that some reverence is due to him of whom it is said in Holy Writ, "holy and reverend is his name."

Baptist laymen know that their adherence to the Bible teaching secures to them the application of such epithets as narrow, illiberal, bigoted, and such like ; but these do not move them ; they propose to be as liberal with what belongs exclusively to themselves as *they* please, and no more liberal with what belongs to God than *he* pleases. They exercise the right to do as *they* please with what is their *own* ; they bow in humble submission to the command and teaching of the Lord of the universe as to all things in respect to which he has been pleased to furnish direction. When misjudged or misrepresented, they propose to endure that hardness as good soldiers, and “when reviled to revile *not* again.”

Baptist laymen know that the charge

profusely made that by their action they design to unchristianize all connected with non-Baptist denominations is eminently untrue. They know that such denominations have embraced, and now embrace, many of earth's grandest Christian men—men without whose Christian piety and beneficence the world would be vastly poorer; but no amount of regard and respect for good men can justify any one in respecting their errors or imitating their neglects. *Such* non-Baptist Christians express no bitterness towards Baptists; their own faithfulness to what they have been taught to believe, leads them to respect those who conscientiously differ from them. Many of them have said, in substance, to Baptists, “If we believed as you believe, that the baptism to which

Christ yielded himself, and which he enjoined upon his followers, was by immersion, we should act as you do with reference both to baptism and the Lord's Supper, for we believe that none but those who have been baptized are qualified to come, properly, to the Lord's Table."

When Christian men know as they are known, it will not surprise Baptist laymen to find among the redeemed hosts many whom the general Christian world would not have fellowshiped on earth. They sympathize with the sentiment once kindly and pityingly expressed by an estimable non-Baptist to his (as he doubtless believed), erring Baptist traveling companion, "There is no knowing how much of error in doctrine is consistent with salvation."

To Baptist laymen, baptism is no charm, no fetich, by which evil is chased away and good secured ; by which, as by a miracle, sin is transformed into holiness. They without anxiety see the death-bed convert pass out of time into eternity without an application, small or great, of water in baptism. They sorrow not as those without hope when infants, without any sort of baptism, leave the earth forever ; they feel assured that baptism has no power to aid, and non-baptism no power to prevent, their exchange of this world for a better one. So far as they can understand and appreciate the facts as they exist, they as Baptists place far less stress upon the fact of baptism than do Pedobaptist Christians.

If it be asked to what extent do these

convictions of Baptist laymen now prevail, as compared with earlier days, it may in reply be safely said that these are more firmly and more widely held than ever before, and that the effect of the ungenerous, if not unchristian, criticism and opposition they meet leads them to a closer study of the Bible, which necessarily tends to extend and deepen these convictions. Those connected with Baptist churches who display discordant sentiments before the public are not those who are contented with the soundness of their position and surroundings, but those who are discontented, and these may be regarded as much resembling the unattached attendants upon a moving army. Sometimes in the van, oftener outside the wings, and frequently in the rear, such

attendants hover, and pursue their vocation, whatever that may be ; but he who is used to warfare knows that these are not the army, and he knows also that the more boisterous and aggressive these are, so much the larger is the compact and disciplined host which they accompany, and whose steady, firm, and onward march their action but attests.

Baptist laymen regard it as being to the last degree unwise and unsafe to be controlled or influenced by mere sympathy or sentimentalism, or to trust to inner consciousness or spiritual intuitions in relation to these important matters, save only so far as such sympathies and intuitions are in precise accord with the sacred teaching and example. They know that such sentimentalism and sup-

posed spiritual insight have led to gross error in respect to other matters, and they know no reason why, if exercised in respect to these subjects, the result should not be the same.

Baptist laymen are convinced that they must stand firmly upon the side of the examples, the teachings, and the commands of God's word; for they know that otherwise men are liable to drift to the opposite side, where are to be found the tastes and the judgments, the glosses and traditions and commandments, of men; and at the extreme of these the teachings and guesses of skeptical scientists, with their ceaseless and kaleidoscopic changes of affirmation respecting the truths of creation, and the constitution, the relations, and the duties of man-

kind ; these changes taking place as often as the instrument is placed to a new eye, and with apparently a new (to them) combination of the movable particles ; the whole body of such scientists being consistent mainly in this, that the theories of each demolisher of revealed truth are demolished by his own skeptical scientific successor at some not distant period.

The Baptist laymen of to-day are indifferent as to what were the creeds, or confessions, or declarations of any Council, or Association, or church of their own or of any other name, as expressed at any time or in any place, save only so far as such declarations, confessions, or creeds truly present that which is Bible example and teaching and truth. They

are so thoroughly committed to the teachings of the Bible, the whole Bible, and to whatever truly elucidates the teachings of the Bible in respect to all religious truths, that if those who disagree with them will but show them that they have misread and misunderstood the Bible respecting the subjects here spoken of, this will secure a prompt abandonment of their present position. Only this is needed to enable the non-Baptist Christian world to get rid forever of this disturbing element; but until such proof is furnished, Baptist laymen propose to persist unflinchingly in those actions which attest their fidelity to the Great Teacher.

Such a host demands great leaders—men who are able to keep at the head of their respective columns, to lead them on

from conquering to conquer, in unyielding fealty to the Great Captain of salvation. Such leaders the Baptist ministry should be, but their leadership must be earnest and active, if they mean to keep in advance of thinking, conscientious Baptist laymen.

These being their convictions, Baptist laymen should heartily and conscientiously sustain them in their respective churches, in their denominational societies, and before all the world, and do it in testimony of fealty to God. These being the convictions of Baptist ministers, they have peculiar and important duties to perform; while holding and "speaking the truth in love,"—love to God and to man,—let them be sure to hold and speak it firmly and openly before God and man.

Baptists everywhere, and of every position, should remember that among the denominations there is but *one* in all the land which will maintain and circulate these scriptural and important truths. For that purpose, this Society was created and is sustained; and its scores of thousands of income should be swelled to hundreds of thousands, and the exertions of each individual Baptist should be increased in like proportion. God has declared, "Them that honor me will I honor." Believing this, Baptists can well afford to be faithful and earnest for the truth, and the whole truth, as it is taught in the Bible.





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